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SUBJECT: NOVEMBER MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS AN ACCURATE GAUGE OF DEMOCRACY IN MOZAMBIQUE?

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Members of Mozambican political parties and civil society met in early July to review preparations for the November 19 municipal elections. The participants identified three elements critical to the success of the elections: transparency in the election process, party control of members, and independent media coverage. Participants also discussed the electoral dominance of FRELIMO and the lack of voter connection to national representatives as explanations for the significant decrease in voter participation in national elections. The November municipal elections should serve as a realistic referendum on how Mozambicans view the Guebuza administration. END SUMMARY.

TRANSPARENCY ESSENTIAL

¶2. (U) Mozambique will hold elections in all of its 43 municipalities on November 19: this will be the first local election held in the 10 new municipalities created by the National Assembly in April. In early July, numerous representatives of Mozambique's political parties, electoral bodies, universities, religious leaders, and the media gathered to review preparations for the municipal elections. Hoping to assure that electoral results are peacefully accepted, the attendees urged the National Electoral Committee (CNE) to operate openly: the CNE was roundly criticized for its closed process in the previous election, especially for its refusal to publicize its criteria for determining the validity of vote tally sheets. Participants also called for more transparency in tabulating votes, including the use of independent observers, as well as public prosecution of those committing voting irregularities. (Note: During the 2003 local elections, judicial authorities did not prosecute FRELIMO or RENAMO party members caught manipulating vote tallies and stuffing ballot boxes. End note.) The restructuring of the Technical Secretariat for Electoral Administration (STAE) earlier this year--removing political appointees and replacing them with neutral professionals--was viewed as supportive of transparency, although some critics alleged that STAE had failed to conduct voter registration in some areas supportive of RENAMO.

VIOLENCE MUST BE MINIMIZED

¶3. (U) Referring to a history of threats and burning of opponents' homes, participants called on FRELIMO and RENAMO to take measures to ensure that their members refrain from acts of violence. Noted journalist Salomao Moyana recalled a tour of the country in which he found such strong political rivalries between FRELIMO and RENAMO supporters that party activists and even members of the police threatened opposition-party politicians with violence or death should they hold rallies on FRELIMO turf. Other participants urged that political parties educate members on constitutionally protected rights, such as the freedom of expression and the freedom to exercise political rights, noting that these

rights are not well known outside of Maputo.

INDEPENDENT MEDIA, CAMPAIGN FINANCING ESSENTIAL

14. (U) Participants generally agreed that an independent media is critical to transparent, acceptable elections. Some suggested independent funding for the media, particularly since the current practice of candidates paying members of the media to accompany during campaigning can affect media independence. Others alleged that, although Mozambican law requires state sponsored media to be neutral, the state-owned daily newspaper, radio, and television stations give more extensive and favorable coverage to FRELIMO. The head of a small opposition party called for state financing for all political parties as a way of increasing choices for the electorate, adding that state support for the campaigns of only FRELIMO and RENAMO had contributed to the bipolarization of Mozambican politics and accelerated the trend towards a one-party system.

VOTER TURNOUT IN NATIONAL ELECTIONS DECREASING

15. (U) Participants noted with concern the decrease in the number of registered voters voting in national elections: in the country's first national elections, held in 1994, 87% of eligible voters voted. In 1999 69% voted and in 2004 only 36% of those eligible voted. The primary factors in the rapid decrease in participation were deemed to be loss of

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interest in the national elections due to one-party domination and lack of relationship to those elected. The director of the Mozambican chapter of the Media Institute of Southern Africa suggested that a more independent and better-funded press could better inform voters, resulting in greater electoral participation.

COMMENT: LOCAL ELECTIONS BETTER REFLECT NATIONAL FEELING?

16. (SBU) The development of democracy in Mozambique may be more accurately observed in the municipal elections than in the national elections. A personal knowledge of the candidates creates a feeling of ownership of the process, a purpose for participation, and some sense of accountability. The national elections, dominated since independence by FRELIMO, provide a slate of unknown candidates designated by the winning party and usually with no connection to their constituents. Outside the capital, many citizens vote only because they are required to do so as a condition of their employment, or at the specific recommendation of their village elder. As such, the November municipal elections should serve as a realistic referendum on how Mozambicans view the Guebuza administration.

Chapman